

MFA PROJECT REPORT

Taylor Barnes Fibers
Spring 2019

WHO'S NEXT?

1201 W Mulberry Street Denton TX 76201 May 1-4

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the University of North Texas, Amie Adelman, and the Fibers Department for allowing me the space to create openly and freely. Thank you Dornith Doherty and Lauren Cross for your time and being a part of my committee along with Annette Lawrence, for your support and guidance during my time here. Finally, thank you Alyssa Russell, for being the most supportive, consistent, encouraging, and amazing friend I could have asked for through this experience. I couldn't have done it without you girl.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My work expresses personal experiences dealing with race, identity, and social critique. As an African American woman born and raised in Texas, it is not uncommon for me to be the only black face in white spaces. Being framed as the "other" has been ingrained in my existence, affecting the way I navigate through life. Throughout my time in graduate school, I have

constructed my own framework of identity. Referencing history and its permanent effects on the present, my work explores the internal and external complexities of being a black woman in America today.

I believe the idea of race is impacted not only by one's external appearance but social constructs of understanding. To speak of being a black woman in America, I bring to attention the African American race as a whole and its dispositions throughout history. This country's collective memory of American history has been altered to fit into a narrative to be profited by anyone who is not of color. Expression of injustice and oppression by people of color is seen as overexpressed and irrational, yet white privilege masks and exoticizes the realities of living in a black body. To fully understand this position of minorities, it must stay in the conversation and in spaces where they are misrepresented or non-existent. Whether that is in art or politics, the discussions of race have had a consistent narrative, one that seems to change depending on the political climate, which is at a climax today. This lack of understanding and selective ignorance has only pushed me further into my purpose of making.

I want my work to join in the conversation of altering perspectives and approaches to continuing constructive dialogue about the African American diaspora. The ability to waver between being a woman and being black is powerful. I believe women of color are the most underrepresented voice in art yet have the most complex stories and perspectives. I have made this time in my graduate studies to research and self-reflect my understanding of identity, realizing that it has never been encouraged for me to find. Aside from being a part of a black family or existing in this body and experiencing life in it, have never been taught the history of my existence in educational institutions. In turn, leaves us unaware proven now to be problematic. Being taught European history and not my own in a space I very much exist hindered my own self-discovery. Rationalizing and internalizing these discoveries in institutional settings without a true ally was isolating.

This has driven me to have a stronger research-based approach to making. I have found it to be a great challenge yet, a sense of fulfillment in making when I can find ways to re-contextualize literature into something tangible. Reading from authors like W.E.B. DuBois and bell hooks is where I found an entry point in subconscious thought, narrative, and the importance of the black voice. Historical literature from authors like Kirk Savage has helped me understand structural themes in history such as social positions, hierarchy, and collective memory. bell hooks made an impact in my way of thinking about agency in voice, authenticity, and the theme of object vs. subject. Black bodies being "objects" and never being the "subject" was my strongest takeaway. From this, my research changed to construct my personal narrative, a metaphorical manual of existing as black women in America. Which pushed me to explore artists of color.

My immediate draw was to find artists who speak in a similar context I was beginning to examine. But also, those who looked like me. Since proven difficult to find an abundance written about, I began with the ones I knew and hoped to find more. Carrie Mae Weemes, Wangechi Mutu, Simone Leigh, Allison Saar, Kara Walker, and Sonya Clark; women I believe are creating work to speak to a deeper discovery of self and experiences for me to relate to. I appreciate how each artist expresses their complex rationalizations of self and discovery. Existing in this body and bringing context and our strength through it is sometimes hidden in plain sight.

Early on in my practice I was exploring clay to push past functional into sculptural. I continued to work with ceramics at the beginning of my graduate studies, balancing clay and fiber to coexist as a form and viewing materials as a mirror of self. Barbara Hepworth along with Naum Gabo became artists I grew fond of relating to formal qualities and mixed media approaches to sculpture. I used raku firing with bisque, unglazed clay which created a rich black surface on the vessels.

By adding cotton fiber around and through the forms with knotting, netting, and plain weave techniques, I valued them as self-portraits and a form of self-reflection. I was creating barriers of protection with fragile materials, which I found to have become metaphors of quieting myself for the world's comfort. I was at a vulnerable space in making and within myself. I had reached a point where I was ready to begin my own self-discovery and understanding and to become louder and confident in it. Finding my own validation on to open up and begin asking and searching. Further into my graduate studies, I was prompted to create work from these 3D forms into 2D explorations and allow these works to become this bold voice.

Using fiber, charcoal, clay, and text I reveal themes of race, identity, and cultural critique. Positioning my personal experiences and myself in relation to object and subject, I create artwork that brings consciousness to the experience of the "other," or more directly, our oppression. Conversations dealing with identity politics have been buried in mainstream society's collective memory and educational institutions. There is no point of entry for understanding the different experiences that exist between races. This dehumanizes our realities and generates an oppressive mentality, which has been deemed as normal. In my artwork, I bridge personal experiences with history. My work demonstrates a connection between the repeated unchanged past and begins a conversation of understanding and reflection in the present.

I create large-scale works on cloth with charcoal, stitching, and appliqué in order to explore forms, symbols, and text. Charcoal has an entrancing presence depending on the way it is used. This messy, dark, and at times uncontrollable material has the ability to be visually agitated, anxious, and finite depending on its application. It can reflect time and agency, become dense and textured through layering, yet it is as fragile as dust; delicate and ever-changing. Whether obsessively making small marks or utilizing my entire body to transform large shapes with layers upon layers of charcoal, my work converses about time, counting bodies, or representing objects in history as a conversation about dehumanization and personal self-reflection represented in the slave auction block titled "Come, Stand on the Throne."

Being the only black female in my graduate program, I found there is an overwhelming sense of labor in repeatedly explaining my experience in the world. This stems from the lack of information and selective ignorance in critiquing artists of color. I intensively reflect on this circumstance through my work, and it has resulted in a strong desire to research independently in order to compensate for a lack of representation and guidance. A result of this is realizing the power of text and has expanded my practice with literature, language, and art. I choose to use this newfound purpose to highlight my position in this space, and to prompt the viewer to contemplate. With this in mind, creating titles for my artwork directly informs the conversation, and takes away some of the weight of explaining the piece's purpose and meaning.

My artwork adds to the conversation of cultural critique and creating dialogues about identity politics. Being a black woman born and raised in Texas has forced me to accept my position, or rather a disposition, in society. Navigating through life has not felt like freedom but predestined for survival. To place myself in the world early on, oral history was all I had as cultural knowledge. My sense of self and connection to blackness was provided through my family. The dominant historical narrative continues to expose important truths that are left out of the conversation and rarely reflected on. If I am to believe history as it is written-I do not exist-there is nothing to be said about me or any other race. I have recognized in order for me to have a sense of belonging, it will not be given to me freely more so something I have to search and fight for.

Annotated Bibliography

Albers, Anni. *On Weaving*. Wesleyan, 1976.

This book written by Anni Albers is a well-known textile artist, designer, and printmaker. Being an educator alongside her husband Josef Albers at Bauhaus and Black Mountain College, Anni's expertise in textile design and weavings were some of the most important of the 20th century. This book demonstrates the meditation of weaving, weaving forms, tools, and techniques and design.

Author, Elissa. *String Felt Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Elissa Author discusses American artist of the 1960s and '70s who advanced the scope of understanding fibers as "low" craft to "high" art. Demonstrating artist who used unconventional materials such as felt, thread, and rope and displaying the work not only 2D but sculpturally. Artists such as Rose Slivak who posited an antithesis between the loom and off-loom construction techniques, along with Lenore Tawney's open warp weavings which at the time were seen as "going against the rules of weaving". Relating to these new ways of constructing fiber art, themes of permanence, impermanence and archival fiber art were in question. Also dialogue of craft work being seen as amateur work or expert craft as fine art.

Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia*. Reaktion Books, 2000.

David Batchelor *Chromophobia* was written in a discussion of westerns culture to color, and how it is viewed as foreign or corrupt. This cultural aversion to color alters perception, and in this book, Batchelor tracks this disconnect. Ideas of white being connected to purity, minimal, and very clear and direct, are topics Batchelor challenges with Anglo- American mentalities. He asks, "what motivates this fixation with white?" Western constructs of what white is and what it signifies are something so ingrained and read to be a challenge to disconnect from.

Bell, Nicholas R. Wonder. GILES, 2016.

With this book, Nicholas Bell demonstrates learning how to let go of our general perceptions and experiencing the world around you in the simplest form. For example, Bell prompts exercises to the reader of walking down a street and observing the environment. Are we just analyzing the houses? Or are we looking at the roof, the texture of it, the color, the scale of the house, what is around it, what the numbers of the house indicate, what the mailbox's function is, the power lines that connect the street, etc. As an artist, these informal exercises prompt an understanding of observation and what we question. Allowing the reader's minds to wander into thought and experience moments deeply.

Bois, W.E.B. Du. The Souls of Black Folk. 1903.

The Souls of Black Folk written by W.E.B. Du Bois is one of the most important books written for African American literature and sociology. He is writing from his own personal experiences as an African American man in the American society of his time. These essays and personal narratives depict race and his coined term "double consciousness". This is the idea that black people live in a world where they have to navigate through two fields of consciousness; how they view themselves and how the world may view them.

Co, Sikkema Jenkins &. Kara Walker Sikkema Jenkins and Co. Is Compelled to Present The Most Astounding And Important Painting Show of the Fall Art Show Viewing Season. 2017.

This artist statement by Kara Walker, published by Sikkema Jenkins & Co., was in response to her work and its perception. A different tone from any other artist statement she had written, Kara expresses her disapproval of the perception of her work and even herself in the art world. She states, "But frankly I am tired, tired of standing up, being counted, tired of "having a voice" or worse "being a role model." Tired, true, of being a featured member of my racial group and/or my gender niche." This honest statement is one to pay close attention to, for it demonstrates a new voice of consciousness from such an established artist that feels her representation has been molded by the art world into something other than what she believes she is.

Fishman, Elly. Why Amanda Williams Painted This Building the Color of Flamin' Hot Cheetos. 2015.

Amanda Williams, a visual artist, and architect repaints structures on the South Side of Chicago colors that are correlated with the black urban experience. Painting a soon-to-be-condemned building the color of the known Frito-Lay branded Hot Cheetos, that notoriously stains the fingers of anyone who eats them. Commenting on color theory and the impermanence of much of the architecture found on this side of town, bringing awareness to economic and cultural issues that remain prominent on the South Side. Her latest work was on display as part of the 2015 Chicago architecture biennial.

Frech, Claire Breukel and Mario Cader. *Performing El Salvador Contemporary Art: A Social and Political Gauge*. 2016.

This article was published in response to Crack Rodriguez's performance art piece that was filmed in protest to the E Salvador's second round of a closely tied election March 9, 2014. The article states that many Salvadorans felt disillusioned by the lack of an alternative voting choice. Rodriguez went into the ballot station, penned his vote on the card, tore it in half, put his vote into the ballot box, and proceeded to eat the other half of the voting card. Within hours, the video taken went viral.

Frederick A. Horowitz, Brenda Danilowitz. *Josef Albers: To Open Eyes: The Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Yale*. Phaidon, 2006.

Josef Albers was a well-known art educator at Bauhaus College and Black Mountain College, whose work helped form the basis of art education specifically, color theory. In this book, he expresses, "color is a deception" and, "color is always fooling us." He demonstrates how color behaves with direct observation in his teachings. He expresses colors humanistic intrinsic qualities whether they are studied isolated or examined with other colors. Things such as "simultaneous contrast" investigated by Micheal Eugene Chevreul are a few of the phenomenon known to be taught by Albers. This parallels the phenomenon of color through Albers own teachings, observations, theories, and experimentations.

Fyfe, Joe. *The Uses of Pleasure: Michelle Grabner at James Cohan*. Hyperallergic, 2014.

This article was is in response to a notorious critical review examining Michelle Grabner's "A Few Minutes...With Michele Grabner." This article is a response to the harsh reviews of her body of work to which Fyfe points out that most of the criticism was coming from additive painters purely off their own preferred personal aesthetic. This work seems to question and address the limits of what a painting is. Expressing that making a picture can happen in many ways, which in Grabner's defense, can also include punctured large sheets of cardboard and painting with a brush around holes. Making work as a pleasure, demonstrating how everyday life effects one's practice, and lastly, revealing metaphors that do not rely on narrative.

hooks, bell. *Art On My Mind: Visual Politics I*. New Press, 1995.

bell hooks' *Art on My Mind* discusses the visual politics of critiquing and discussing art and aesthetics. Commenting on the critical discourse of identity politics, specifically the lacking of the critical discourse of black artists. Through interviews and short essays, and personal narratives, hooks has constructed a fluid idea of questions and agency needed to further the discourse of conversation, specifically with the lack of voice and expression from artists of color. For example, the interview with Carrie Mae Weems reveals topics in her work that have been either misinterpreted or over looked dealing with not just being a black woman but seeing her position in the world further than race. hooks is able to remind the reader what is most important, which is the art itself and what is being expressed through it.

hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press, 1989.

bell hooks, writer and culture critic, speaks of the feminist consciousness in *Talking Back: The Feminist, Thinking Black*. hooks uses personal narrative to connect the meaning of self-discovery of self, being a black woman, in a male supreme world. Diving into personal experiences of being silenced within her reasonings of power and status and recognizing these oppressive taught behaviors.

Joan Livingstone, John Ploof. *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production*. School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press, 2007.

The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production explore textiles production, and its connection to labor. Topics dealing with the social, political, economic factors that come into context with textile manufacturing. Understanding that culturally there is a dismissed consciousness of cloth as a made material and its place in our everyday life, the politics behind production whether it is mass produced or handmade, the labor is undermined. Ploof and Livingston bring into the conversation of paid labor, access, and industry.

Klein, Jeana Eve. *For What It's Worth: The French Knot as a Basic Trade Commodity*. Prod. Textile Society of America. 2016.

Jeana Klein, a fibers artist, demonstrates the relationship between art and commodity. In this article, she speaks of her experience of using her French knotted works as a means of trade for either a service or object. French knots are one of the most time and labor-intensive stitched surface processes. At first, she was just making for the visual aesthetic of the French knot. Then she was being questioned of the amount of time and the number of knots she was producing on the cloth at a time. She considered utilizing this information as a source of trade. For every knot, she stitched and how many appeared on the cloth, she would trade for service, demonstrating that the hand has worth, and the knots because of a basic trade commodity.

Lambert, Steve. *No Longer Interested. A Blade of Grass' Growing Dialogue*, 2014.

Lambert challenges artists to take the phrase "I am interested in" from our vocabulary of beginning a conversation of why we like something. He believes it's a phrase that is undermining expressing what we really find "interesting" because it is hardly descriptive. Instead of leaning on these four words, refocusing and rephrasing the conversation of what an artist is doing. Because everyone is interested in something, what is the artist doing to further express what it is? Being able to detach from an interest in the action of why pushes the part of making that separates from simple interest. As far as being an artist, what is being observed, constructed, and reimagined bring out the interest, bring forward a sense of clarity and purpose which is powerful.

McBrinn, Joseph. "Needlepoint for Men: Craft and Masculinity in Post-War America." *The Journal of Modern Craft* (2015): 301-331.

This article from *The Journal of Modern Craft* discusses the intersection between masculinity and craft in the mid 20th century. Fiber art at this time seemed to only read as feminine, and men

at this time working with applique or needle processes were struggling with their perception of masculinity. To them, the act seemed "unmanly." Inserting themselves into the craft vernacular seemed to serve as problematic. Being perceived as heterosexual or homosexual haunted modern American masculinity. This in return further ostracized female artists who were further oppressed by the idea that craft is women's work and not seen as fine art unless it was "masculine".

Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-century America*. Princeton University Press, 1999.

In this book Kirk Savage discusses the United States and its history, beginning with its time as a slave owning society. Referring back to pre and post-civil war, acknowledging the violence the United States inflicted on captured slaves, and the lives that were lost. This, leading into the conversation of monuments and their purpose of upholding a false collective memory. Essays of how figures were chosen to become immortalized, their replication, and the agency of the U.S. to be created these misrepresented placeholders of a shameful history. Savage expresses the myth of these monuments somehow uniting the people of its society when in reality, they only uphold the oppressive mindset of racism.

Sifuentes, Aram Han. *Steps Towards Decolonizing Craft*. Prod. Textile Society of America. 2017.

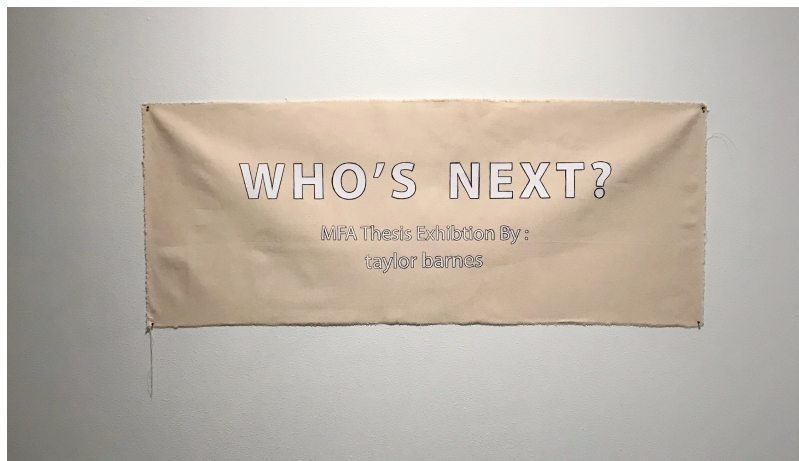
Aram Sifuentes writes this article to layout step to take to decolonize craft in contemporary art. In her work, she examines immigration, citizenship, race, and craft. She believes often times, the crafts of other people are primitive, fetishized, appropriated, and stripped of their context and believes we assert our own baggage onto other cultures. "Rejecting the values and hierarchies asserted in western cultures to differentiate craft and art" is one of the many steps towards decolonizing craft that she states are the initial hard stage of progression. Recognizing that the Western culture specifically in Contemporary Art idolizes the "other," finding ways to utilize and to transform to make "ours" when it never was. Breaking the cycle of this exploitive practice is just the beginning. Refocusing the approach and how to create other narratives that are built on decolonized perspectives is a step she believes is an essential beginning.

Turner, Luke. "Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction." *Notes on Metamodernism* (2015).

As stated in this brief article, this was published in the literary magazine from a talk presented at the Royal College of art in 2014. It discusses the term "metamodernism" and how the term has begun developing in contemporary culture, which is arguably moving past postmodern mode of the last 20th century. It is argued that metamodernism engages with the resurgence of sincerity, hope, romanticism, affect and the potential for grand narratives and universal truths. This is seen as a slight divergence from postmodernism and what it is leading to, which is the experience.

Weschler, Lawrence. *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: Expanded Edition*. University of California Press, 2009.

This book documents interviews Lawrence Weschler has with the well-known contemporary artist Robert Irwin. Following his early beginning as an artist and his shifts through his artmaking from abstract paintings, to avant-garde and contemporary works, Irwin's interests and understanding of what art is and can be is an interesting addition to the understanding of what one sees and understands in art. Reading of moments he spent creating artist collectives, living in different countries, and resorting to complete isolation for a period of time all connect to understanding his approaches to moments of his art practice. Each moment evolving to the next, becoming hooked on his own curiosity.



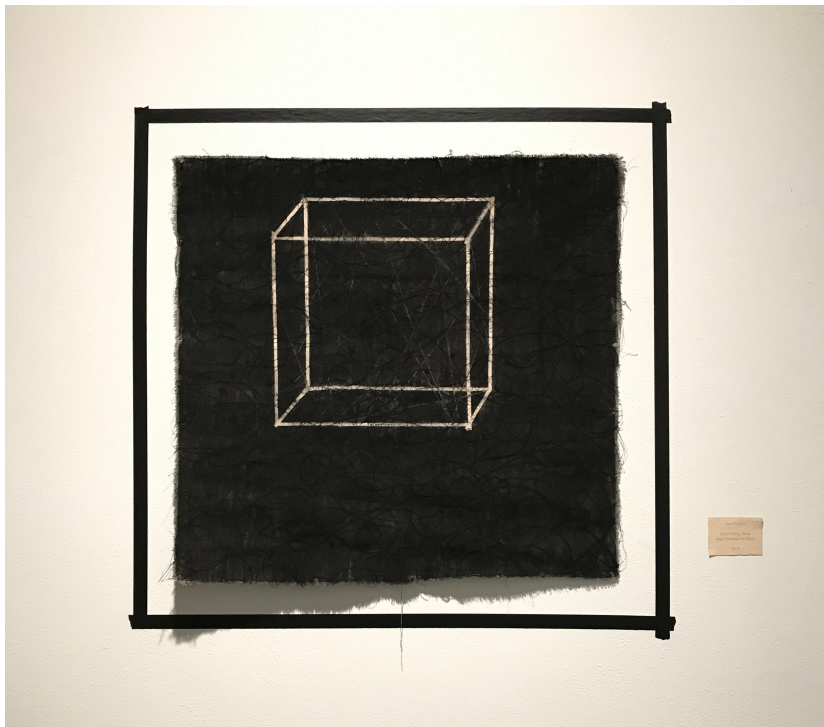
"WHO'S NEXT?"
(show title)



Code Switch
MX Dye + Charcoal on Cloth
48 in x 72 in
2017-2019



Come, Stand On The Throne
Indigo + Charcoal on Cloth
48 in x 48 in
2018



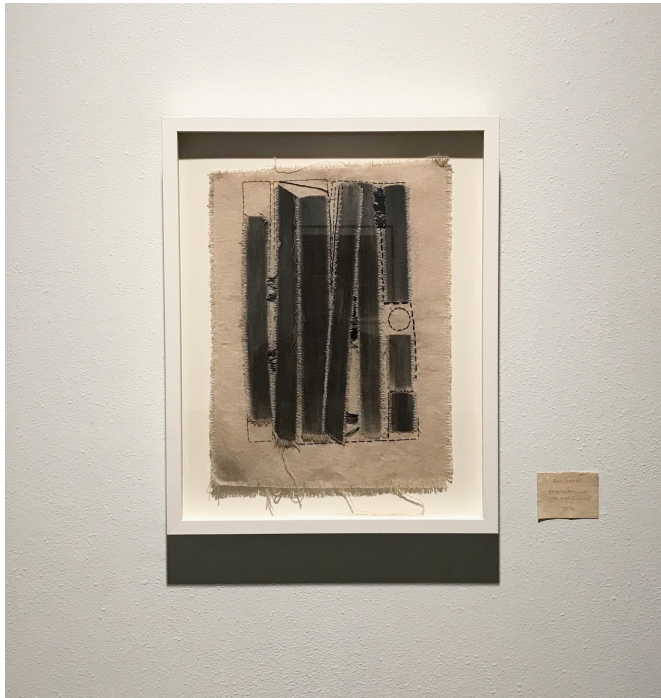
Free To Be?
Stitching + Charcoal on Cloth
24 in x 24 in
2019



Some "Thing" Is Missing
 Digital Printing + Charcoal on Cloth
 48 in x 60 in
 2018-2019



Nah.
 Charcoal + Tape on Cloth
 48 in x 72 in
 2019



Exit Door# 7
Embroidery, Applique + Charcoal on Cloth
12 in x 24 in
2018



Detail of Install
2019



Detail of Install
2019



Detail of Install
2019